Healing From Within:
An Interview with Dr. David Frawley

From "**The Mind of the Guru**" by Rajiv Mehrotra

Part I.

On India.

Q: You have often been described as an Indian in an American body. You have written extensively on the Indiantraditions of the Vedas, Ayurveda, Vedic astrology and a whole range of issues associated with the Hindu Indian heritage. You have helped articulate this to the West and to India itself. There is a great deal of debate on what it is to be Indian, what is the Indian identity. Could you explain your perception of this "Indianness" in India.

A: In India there is a wonderful continuity of literature and culture. The culture is very diverse, with unique characteristicsand a distinctive spiritual emphasis on dharma. It has a sacred orientation towards spiritual, yogic and meditational practices that have a broad view of culture –its unity, diversity and multiplicity. Moreover, under this greater dharmic orientation there is an integration of art, science and spirituality.

Q: In the contemporary debate, the manner in which we explore our diversity in a uniquely Indian perspective is a majorissue.

A: First of all, compared to the ancient cultures of Egypt, Babylonia and Greece, India is the only ancient civilization thathas managed to endure the course of time. What little remains from those other civilizations, the religious practices like murti puja – the worship of images – and temple worship are still performed in India today. The unparalleled continuity of civilization in India has brought these ancient spiritual practices into the modern scientific age.

Further, I feel that the view of consciousness, the science of consciousness, consciousness as the supreme reality, human life as a species for the evolution of consciousness, is unique to the Indian ethos. India has nurtured the culture of consciousness in all its forms without clashing with, or contradicting, the diversity of religions, philosophies, spiritual practices and lifestyles which are integrated into the culture.

Q: To what degree might this be a romanticized version of a vision of India.

A: To some extent it is a romanticized version of an aspect of India. More importantly I would say that it is an image ofthe soul of India that is still struggling to emerge

in the modern age because India as a civilization was under foreign rule for nearly a thousand years. While India was under the British, there was a systematic attempt to undermine the older institutions and values of its culture.. Also, while under foreign rule, inertia was a by-product of the society and many customs were initiated that did not reflect the older and more dynamic civilization. While still beneath the surface, I believe that the true spiritual and progressive essence of India remains the most dynamic force in its culture today.

Q: How would you describe the value of this heritage and tradition in the context of globalization, the new economicorder, liberalization and the influence of capitalism?

A: We are moving towards a more global or planetary age, but so far this globalism is being defined materialistically andin a consumeristic way. Unfortunately, I would have to say that, coming from America, most of this globalization is still colonialism in another form or, more aptly, Americanization in another form.

Indian traditions can offer the world the means to bring us into a true planetary age whereby we can connect to the spirit of the planet and with the greater universal consciousness. It is not just a matter of free trade. Today India is entering into the global arena and consumerism is

coming here. At the same time, the India we have still represents the socialistic model such as used to exist in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.
So it is not a clash between spiritual India and the modern West, but between this old Soviet model and to a great extent a bureaucratic model that must undergo change. The Indian people can compete well in the global market if they are taken out of the shackles of their own government and bureaucracy. Indians are achieving well outside of India in the global context. They are among the most educated and affluent of ethnic groups in countries like the US and UK. The question is, why aren’t they allowed to do so well in India? . .

Q: What potential do you see in the Indian heritage that can contribute to the changing aspects of culture in coming toterms with new values such as materialism? . .

A: There are two sides to this particular issue. First, the global consumer is not much of a culture at all. Fast food, violentmovies – that is no real culture. In fact, the so-called culture in Europe and America revolves around nineteenth century art and music. We are seeing a phenomenal destruction of culture all over the world, just as we are seeing a destruction of species.

In countries such as India there is a greater diversity of culture and a greater antiquity of culture. For example, the

literature of any of the main regions of India is much older than the literature of any English or European culture. There needs to be a preservation of culture today just as there is this idea to preserve different species and habitats. Second, the spiritual practices of Indian culture can be popular and transferred to other cultures in the world once they are offered to the global community for examination and global adaptation.

Q: There is resistance and suspicion in India that promoting and preserving the cultural aspects of the Indian heritagemight lead to a dull uniformity. And this in turn might become another form of totalitarianism, contrary to the spirit of plurality that you referred to..

A: India is the most diverse country in the world and the danger would be anarchy and not totalitarianism. Unfortunately,many people here have a Western education and the ideas that they have about society, the world and the human mind have actually prevented them from understanding their own civilization. Consequently, when they look at their civilization from these wrong ideas, it looks wrong to them. It is like an image in a distorted mirror.

I would encourage these people to study the Indian traditions more – the scriptural texts and modern teachers of India – before making uninformed judgments. We should try to understand the traditions of

India through the people who have practiced them, lived them and represent them rather than accept the views of people who are incapable of understanding a culture so different from Western traditions..

Part 2.

On Ayurveda and Vedic Astrology

Q: How does Ayurveda view the mind and what is the value of that perception when modern medicine looks at the mindas a biochemical complex. The US Surgeon General recently released a report which makes the case that all mental illness is biochemical in nature, not unlike a case of indigestion, the common cold or virus.

A: The Vedic tradition has self-realization as the goal of life – self-realization as an inner change inconsciousness, enlightenment or the realization of our divine nature. In the Ayurvedic view we recognize that that there is an integral and organic connection between body and mind, but there is a higher spirit and self that transcends both body and mind. It is that higher self that we are truly seeking. To discover that higher self we need to initiate the quality of purity or sattva guna at the level of the mind. When the mind is at that peaceful and silent state, it can perceive the higher reality.

In the Ayurvedic view we cannot reduce the mind to biochemical reactions. Certainly in Ayurveda food affects the mind and the impressions we take in through the senses affect the mind. The environment affects the mind, but the mind itself is its own entity and at a certain level

transcends the body not only in dream but also in the after-death state.

The Western world has been too engrossed in the material aspect of reality and they are looking at the mind externally. But in the Western world, even with all of psychiatry and the use of drugs to deal with the mind, there is a phenomenal explosion of mental and psychological illness. The biggest epidemic in terms of illness going on today in the West is probably depression. It is estimated that half the people over the age of fifty suffer from some sort of depression and at least half of these will end up taking some sort of anti-depressant drug. The drugs may have a temporary effect, but they will not cure the problem. Unless the people taking these drugs recognize the need for a change in the quality of their thoughts and lifestyles, their mental condition will not change.

Q: What are some of the approaches that Ayurveda would recommend for the treatment of diseases of the mind, likedepression?
A: In Ayurveda we like to look at everything in a holistic way relative to the entire human being, which is body, mind, spiritand all aspects of our life and behavior. So we start at the physical level with certain dietary changes – lighter foods that can help at the physical level. We also look the exercise level as a sedentary lifestyle

creates depression. Also, what is very important are the impressions that we take in through the senses. The impressions that we take in feed the mind like food feeds the body, and if we are taking dull and disturbing impressions through the senses then naturally the mind is going to get very dull. There are many forms of sensory therapy such as visualization and meditation, music, colour therapy and aroma therapy. We can change the energetics of the mind and Ayurvedic looks to the practical tools to do so.

The mind is connected to the breath. Certain forms of pranayama are helpful for people who are depressed. Circulating the prana through all parts of the body-mind system also increases health and happiness. And of course there is meditation. If we can bring the mind to a silent and calm state, the mind will heal itself. To facilitate meditation we may require certain mantras like Om. Certain mantras will change the energetics of the mind. The mind has a sound pattern and if we change the sound pattern behind the mind this can change the inertia or any blockages that lead to depression or other types of reduced mental functioning.

Q: The mind is a series of thoughts at one level and people who suffer from mental ailments are uncomfortable with thethoughts that come. Frequently these are based on past experiences or childhood trauma.

The Western approach is to try to retrain the mind and go back to the source of conflict and resolve it in some way. How does the Ayurvedic tradition resolve the conflicts from these imprints on the mind that are creating difficulties for the individual? . .

A: The yoga and Ayurveda tradition recognizes that there are some prime tendencies (samskaras or vasanas) that areresponsible for our karmas and for these traumatic experiences. Anything that threatens our lives tends to create a strong samskaras.

This whole concept of the Ashtanga Yoga tradition, where you have asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and samadhi, are ways of creating higher samskaras. The body is put in a posture that places the energy in a sattvic state. By energizing the breath, senses and mind we are creating a higher samskara.

The Ayurvedic view is that to eliminate a lower samskaras you need to create a higher samskara. It may be a daily meditation routine, eating sattvic food at a regular period, a spiritual retreat, going to various tirthas and temples, etc. There is a whole science of samskaras in the Hindu tradition and cultivating these higher samskaras will reduce the negative. As in the Western tradition merely exposing the negative samskara doesn’t necessarily

eliminate it. That is, making a patient aware of the pain does not necessarily reduce the pain.

So the yogic tradition is a holistic science of human development. It is a science of changing our consciousness in a practical way by using the tools of posture, breath and mantra. Ayurveda adds to this certain dietary, herbal and Pancha karma methods that can help eliminate from the body the disease-causing doshas that trigger or support negative mental states.

Q: You have done a great deal of work on Vedic astrology. Traditionally there has been an intimate relationship betweenAyurveda and astrology in being able to diagnose ailments and prescribe treatments. Astrology is viewed with considerable skepticism by the Western scientific establishment but is, of course, an intrinsic part of our traditions in India. What is the basis of astrology? .

A: First of all, the basis of astrology is that there is a meaningful movement of time. There is a certain rhythm or order totime. Each day is going to be different relative to certain positions of the sun, moon and plants. Time is a movement of karma and it is also a movement of prana. Karma, prana and kala (time) are closely related. In this Vedic view there is an intimate relationship between the individual and the entire universe, between the microcosm and the macrocosm. So the Vedic view is that what is

happening to us at the individual level and the species level is also going to be reflected at a cosmic level through the movements of the stars and planets. Through an understanding of these harmonic inner changes and the movement of time we can adjust our lives accordingly.

For example, we have a weather report that tells us how to deal with atmospheric changes. There are also certain psychic and cosmic sciences that through the stars and the planets. Even modern science tells us how much the sun and the moon affect biology and psychology. Astrology just extends this principle to the other planets involved. Even modern science with its quarks, quasars and black holes is not far from astrology. It is recognizing that there are certain influences that are beyond time and space or ahead of time and space. So we are getting to a point where there can be some validation for the influence of astrology. It is also not a fatalistic system. There are certain things that we can do; there is a certain way to master and understand our karma by being aware of the forces and how they work.
Q: Why is it so difficult to access a good reliable astrologer?

A: There are several reasons for that. First, because astrology has not had a good reputation in this country, people havenot supported it. They don’t pay astrologers properly. And second, as something psychic

and spiritual, it is easier for quackery and false imagination to come into astrology. There are many good astrologers in India today and many of them have a good scientific bent. For example, one of my friends is the head of surgery for a small Delhi hospital as well as an accurate and profound astrologer. So if people who have a scientific and spiritual view come into astrology I think that they can enhance its prestige, but when astrology is marginalized and sensationalized it gets a bad name.

Part 3.

On Yoga, Gurus and Meditation

Q: A very essential part of the India tradition has been the idea of sadhana, or spiritual practice and the role of the guru.What been the role of a teacher for you and what do you see as the role of a guru? .

A: All aspects of life have teachers. Some people say that you don’t need gurus and my response is that in thatcase you don’t need school teachers, music teachers, etc.

Q: But a guru is something more than a teacher! .. .
A: At the first level the guru as a teacher is very necessary. However, when you get to the spiritual level, you are going toneed more than a teacher who gives information. At this level, the guru will be conveying to you a higher state of consciousness. For that the personal example becomes more and more important and the simple teacher role less and less important. So in the Indian tradition there has always been the recognition that the highest knowledge, the reflection of consciousness or self-realization requires, or at last is facilitated by, these great gurus and teachers. If you look at the twentieth century in India and up to the present day, India is still producing

these great self-realized teachers in a way that other countries in the world have not.

Q: How do you evaluate a guru? ..

A: A true teacher emanates a magnetic quality that connects us to them and of course there are different paths. We maybe attracted to different teachers in different ways. But there is a certain blissful quality of love, a consciousness, almost an intimacy at the level of the soul that puts us in touch with the entire meaning of our lives. And I think in a true teacher there is also friendship, kinship and compassion. Ramana Maharshi said that around a great teacher the first thing you will feel is a certain quality of peace that will put your doubts to rest.

Q: So many have been misled by false gurus. What are the risks of that happening and what would you recommend tosomeone seeking the path? . .

A: The risk of false teachers is not only always there but I think that all of us will have to go through at least one falseteacher to find a true teacher. But the important thing is to set forth in motion a process of aspiration and sadhana where we are seeking a higher truth and devoting ourselves to certain practices. So sincerity on the part of

the aspirant is very important. We also have to beware of false imagination.

Spiritual transformation is about the evolution of consciousness. It is a conscious endeavor. False gurus make many offers. Some offer instantaneous enlightenment, almost like an appeal to get-rich-quick schemes. Finally, when the spiritual guru comes into our lives, we have to be sincere and patient and seek peace rather than run after experiences. We need to seek an inner heart connection rather than run after famous personalities and their charisma because charisma can also be created from a purely rajasic level. We also need to have our own internal connection – faith in ourselves and connection with the divine. If we have that, a path will open up for us. It will take time and it may not necessarily be in the form that our mind would like it to be.

Q: You inevitably point to the importance of sadhana, and there are numerous sadhanas available to us which are thestrength of our tradition. You have also written extensively on yoga as a sadhana. Yoga to most people is a process of physical postures and techniques to be preceded by yama and niyama, ethical rules and modes. Most yoga teachers tend to exclude yamas and niyamas. What are the dangers? Why is that ethical system, that framework, so important before commencing a sadhana? .

A: It is an American contribution to limit or emphasize the asana or physical aspect of yoga, and now you see that isbeing re-imported back into India. Classical yoga as defined by Patanjali is a practice of meditation, not a practice of asanas. Now with any endeavor, we have certain basic values, and certain lifestyles are necessary to support it. So yoga requires certain values and a certain lifestyle and these is what yama and niyama teach us whether it is truth, ahimsa or shaucha (purity).

In order to develop at the level of consciousness we have to have the right lifestyle, daily activity, food, impressions, relationships and the proper character. Yoga is about developing energy, but what character, what person and what vessel is that energy coming into? If you don’t have a good vessel it does not matter what you put into it. So preparing the vessel is as important as the techniques that are used to put into the vessel.

Q: Obviously creating the right vessel for the practice of yoga is extremely important. What are the dangers if this isignored? . .

A: The danger is that yoga increases our energy and thought power and that if the proper vessel is not created, the samepractices can create a stronger ego. That is the main danger.

Q: The objective of these processes is a calmer mind and for a person to be happy. But inherent in this is the cultivationof the values of love, compassion and the recognition of interdependence and a whole range of issues that make humans human. What are the techniques that cultivate these values that we identify as human values?

A: They are more than human values. They are dharma, which is the sense of unity on all levels of the universe –humans, plants and animals. This will cultivate a higher sense of compassion within us. So some sense of values is behind all the yogas, but particularly Bhakti Yoga. The cultivation of devotion is not about the love of God as some abstract entity. It is the love of the divine spirit that is everywhere.

Then, the foundational practice of all yoga is Karma Yoga because life is fundamentally action and the foundation of Karma Yoga is service. Action is not something that we do only for ourselves. Action is interdependent with the entire universe – breathing, eating, the processes that are always going on. We are partaking of the entire universe. The universe is also moving through us. This foundation of Karma Yoga is essential to bring these higher values into yoga practice so that your yoga is already a form of service and not something you are doing only for personal gratification.

Q: What kind of sadhana would bring about the transformation of the mind that might develop the values of love andcompassion? . .

A: Sadhana works on different levels, and in yoga we address the entire human being, starting with the body and thetype of asana that will change the level of thought and awareness at a physical level. Changing the diet is another way, because of a lot of our negative psychological patterns rooted in the subconscious mind are caught in various food cravings. The breath and how we breathe is connected to how we use our emotions, how we hold our energies, our thoughts. By changing our breath, we can change these factors.

The whole range of sensory therapies, particularly sound and mantra, can change the energy field of our mind. We can change the stream of our subconscious thoughts. When we sit down to meditate, the mantra comes up. Om Namah Shivaya, and then in meditation we can transcend the mind. So yoga and Ayurveda provide us with tools on all the different levels and sadhana is the practice on all these levels. If people try to sit down and meditation without dealing with the breath and without dealing with thoughts, values and diet it will seldom work because you have not created the lifestyle and values to support it. Our lifestyle is the field in which we grow the plants that are of benefit for our spiritual development. If the ground is not

even cultivated then even if you put the best seed in it, it is not going to grow.

Q: What would you describe as the essential ingredient, the essential motive to meditate? ..

A: Meditation accrues on many levels and I would also discriminate between meditation techniques and the meditativestate. Meditation techniques are used to prepare the mind for meditation, which is a very essential thing. I would describe the state of meditation as bringing the mind into a concentrated calm state, particularly the idea of ekagrachitta, the one-pointed mind.

Once the mind is brought to that state, solutions to the problems of life naturally fall into the mind like falling rain. There is a certain state of mind that we can arrive at in which the solutions to life, the answers to life’s problems come, but that requires tremendous preparation and that preparation for meditation is as important as meditation itself. Meditation, as it is, requires that we have this concentrated, still, silent space in the mind.

Q: What is the direction of your personal sadhana? ..

A: I take an integral approach – the threefold approach of pranayama, mantra and more formless mediation. I findpranayama is a more important way for

internalizing the mind, a kind of pratyahara. It also gives us the internal energy so that when we close our eyes to meditate we don’t fall asleep.

Secondly, the use of mantra. Most of the problems that we have with meditation are that people get eaten up by their subconscious thoughts. If we do regular mantra practice, by changing the sound patterns of the subconscious mind, it becomes our ally in meditation.

From that point meditation is the practice of self-inquiry, particularly that which Ramana Maharshi taught, and the whole process of introspection and examining the meaning of our lives can occur once we have brought our mind into the sattvic state.

The other aspect of meditation is surrender, or the devotional aspect, where we surrender or open up to the divine reality, which is also the same as the higher self. So I try to take that kind of practical and integrated approach a have a number of tools. For example, if my mind gests sleepy than I may do pranayama, or if one mantra appeals tome then I may hold on to it until something comes out of it.

Alternatively, if you fall naturally into a meditative state you just let it be and flow with it. It is like a dance, a tapestry. It is like cultivating a garden and growing

flowers. Once you have done that cultivation in the mind and when you open your mind and close your eyes and look within, it is like entering a vast garden in which there are always things growing and developing, as opposed to just looking within and discovering a darkness or blankness within.